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AASHTO Elects New President, Pete Rahn of Missouri

Pete Rahn, the Director of the Missouri Department of Transportation and a former Director of the New Mexico Department of Transportation, was elected Monday as President of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) which represents the state departments of transportation in Washington, DC.

The AASHTO Board of Directors also elected Allen Biehler, Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, as Vice-President for 2007–2008. Both officers' terms will run through the Board of Directors meeting of the next AASHTO Annual Meeting.

In remarks to AASHTO's 52 member chief executive officers shortly after his election, Rahn noted that the United States is losing ground to other nations as they invest strongly in their transportation infrastructure, even as the U.S. delays investment in a long-superior but deteriorating surface-transportation system.

"We have been lazy as a nation," Rahn said. "The citizens of our states have been permitted to have the wages they receive because of the U.S. transportation system's efficiencies." Without further investment in transportation, Americans cannot safely assume their economic security will continue, he said.

Rahn also outlined three emphasis areas for AASHTO in the coming year, plus two other areas he hopes will be made priorities by the organization. The emphasis areas are:

- AASHTO must be a champion for transportation investment in every state. That will require an extensive—and potentially expensive—public-education campaign, but if the chief executives of the state transportation departments won't champion that cause, Rahn asked, who will?

- AASHTO member states must embrace new strategies that demand accountability and performance measurement. Rahn said he will seek to transform AASHTO's existing Standing Committee on Quality to a Standing Committee on Performance Management.
- AASHTO's members must be lifesavers, embracing the challenge of highway safety not only in a general sense, but by "drilling down" and focusing on a specific area that claims some 39 percent of all lives lost on our highways—"lane departures." The term covers both head-on crashes and those that occur when a single vehicle leaves a roadway and strikes an object such as a tree or post.

Rahn also said he'll seek to have AASHTO and its members work more closely with the trucking industry to explore development of a tractor-trailer system less damaging to U.S. roads, and to expand support for the Technical Curriculum Coordinating Council, an organization that shares education in technical best practices.

As the AASHTO Annual Meeting, held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, drew to a close, the AASHTO Board of Directors also honored Victor Mendez, Director of the Arizona Department of Transportation, for his year of service as AASHTO's President.